Sunan an-Nasa'i 326: Hadith Explanation and Context

The Hadith Text

Sunan an-Nasa'i 326 contains the famous hadith narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him):[1] [2]

> "It was said: 'O Messenger of Allah, you perform Wudu' from the well into which the bodies of dogs, menstrual rags and garbage are thrown?' He said: 'Water is pure and it is not made impure by anything.'"

Understanding the Hadith in Context

The Well of Buda'ah

The hadith specifically refers to the **Well of Buda'ah** (بئر بضاعة), which was located in Medina. According to Abu Dawud's narration, Imam Abu Dawud personally investigated this well and provided detailed measurements:[3] [4]

- **Depth**: The water level reached at most to the pubes, and when low, it went below the private parts of the body
- **Width**: Six cubits in breadth
- **Condition**: The well's condition had not changed from its original state, though Abu Dawud noted the water's color had changed[5] [3]

Scholarly Understanding of the Principle

The statement "Water is pure and it is not made impure by anything" (الماء طهور لا ينجسه شيء) represents a **fundamental principle** in Islamic jurisprudence regarding water purity. However, this principle must be understood within the comprehensive framework of Islamic law.[6] [7]

The Three-Way Framework for Water Purity

According to the attached IslamQA article and scholarly consensus, when impurities fall into water, there are **three possible scenarios**:[7] [8]

1. Water with Changed Characteristics

If impurity changes the water's **color, taste, or smell**, the water becomes impure regardless of quantity - this is agreed upon by scholarly consensus.[7]

2. Large Amount of Water

If impurities fall into a **large amount of water** but don't change its characteristics, the water remains pure - also agreed upon by consensus.[7]

3. Small Amount of Water (The Disputed Case)

The debate centers on small amounts of water that contact impurities without changing characteristics. The **correct scholarly view**, supported by contemporary scholars like Ibn Baz and Ibn Uthaymeen, is that water remains pure unless its characteristics change, regardless of quantity.[8] [7]

The Well of Buda'ah: Practical Application

Why the Well Remained Pure

Several factors explain why the Prophet (peace be upon him) used water from this well:[9] [10]

1. **Large Water Volume**: The well contained abundant water that was not significantly affected by occasional impurities[11]
2. **Natural Dilution**: The large volume naturally diluted any impurities that entered
3. **No Characteristic Changes**: The impurities did not alter the water's essential characteristics
4. **Accidental Contamination**: These impurities were not intentionally thrown in but entered through natural causes like floods and wind[9]

Modern Scientific Understanding

Recent research suggests the well may have had **natural purification mechanisms**:[12]

- The water was a mixture of rainwater and periodically entering household wastewater
- Natural microbial activity could transform contaminated water into cleaner water
- The well's large size and depth allowed for natural filtration processes

Jurisprudential Implications

The Two Qullahs Principle

Another relevant hadith states: "If the water reaches the amount of two Qullahs, nothing can make it impure". However, this should be understood as:[13] [14]

- **Practical guidance** rather than a rigid quantitative rule[15]
- Indicating that larger bodies of water are generally less susceptible to contamination

- The exact measurement of a Qullah is disputed among scholars[15]

Different Schools of Thought

Maliki School: Does not differentiate between large and small quantities of water - purity depends solely on whether characteristics change[16]

Shafi'i School: Generally applies the two Qullahs distinction for certain rulings[17]

Hanafi School: Considers various factors including water quantity and type of impurity[18]

Practical Guidance

The Principle of Caution

While the hadith establishes the general principle of water's purifying nature, scholars recommend **erring on the side of caution** with small amounts of water when known impurities have entered, especially if the water quantity is very small.[8] [7]

Contemporary Applications

This principle applies to modern situations such as:

- **Treated water**: Chlorinated water remains pure for purification purposes[6] [18]
- **Large water bodies**: Swimming pools and reservoirs maintain purity unless characteristics change
- **Small containers**: Require more careful consideration if contamination is suspected

Conclusion

Sunan an-Nasa'i 326 establishes the fundamental Islamic principle that **water is inherently pure and purifying**. The specific case of the Well of Buda'ah demonstrates this principle in practice - a large well with abundant water that maintained its purifying qualities despite occasional contamination because the water's essential characteristics (color, taste, smell) remained unchanged.

The hadith should be understood within the broader Islamic legal framework that considers both the **principle of ease** (yusr) and **practical necessity**, while maintaining the highest standards of purity for worship. The key determining factor is whether impurities actually change the water's fundamental characteristics, not merely their presence in the water.

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1. https://amrayn.com/nasai:326
2. https://sunnah.com/nasai/2
3. https://sunnah.com/abudawud:67
4. https://sunnah.com/abudawud:66

5. https://www.islamicity.org/hadith/search/index.php?q=20358&sss=1
6. https://islamqa.info/en/answers/161045
7. https://islamqa.info/en/answers/224923
8. https://m.islamqa.info/en/answers/224923/when-does-water-become-impure
9. https://www.reddit.com/r/islam/comments/17lxvgs/question_about_hadith_sunan_annasai_326/
10. https://www.reddit.com/r/islam/comments/11xowut/can_someone_please_explain_this_hadith_sunan_abi/
11. https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/116317/water-of-the-well-of-budhaaah
12. https://journal.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/riwayah/article/view/28726
13. https://ahadith.co.uk/hadithnarrated.php?n=Ubaidullah+bin+Abdullah+bin+Umar
14. https://www.islamicity.org/hadith/search/index.php?q=14658&sss=1
15. https://ru.scribd.com/document/290922526/if-Water-Reaches-Two-Qullahs
16. https://www.aliftaa.jo/article-en/5772/Article.aspx?ArticleId=5781
17. https://seekersguidance.org/answers/shafii-fiqh/how-should-i-understand-conflicting-hadith-about-the-purity-of-used-water/
18. https://www.mehbooba.com/understanding-water-purity-in-islam-a-guide-to-well-purification-and-ritual-cleanliness-in-hanafi-fiqh/